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ART BUCHWALD

## What Comes Out in the Wash

I was jogging in Langley when I spied K in rubber boots hosing down a Ford in the CIA carwash. This surprised me because K ranked fourth from the top in the Company's hierarchy and was the last person I expected to see swabbing cars.

"What gives?" I asked him.

K cursed. "I owe this to Vitaly Yurchenko."

"You knew Vitaly Yurchenko?"

"I not only knew him, I was his baby sitter."

I said, "I'm impressed."

"Don't be. That's why I'm washing cars."

"What a tumble for No. 4 in the firm."

"Somebody had to be the fall guy when the rat redefected to Moscow." K sat on the bumper of a sedan. "As Yurchenko's nanny my orders were to stay with him day and night and see that all his needs were taken care of. If he wanted pizza I got him pizza, if he wanted to see an X-rated movie on a VCR I checked one out, and if he wanted to play Trivial Pursuit I gave him all the easy questions. There wasn't anything I couldn't produce, including two tickets to the Redskins game."

"I didn't know the CIA had Redskins tickets."

"We don't. Someone in our basement forges them for us when we're on Company business."

"Were you the one who took Yurchenko to Ottawa so he could meet his Soviet mistress?"

"Of course I was. Yurchenko told me as we drove up that all he had to do to get his loved one to defect was whistle. But it didn't work out that way. Yurchenko whistled and his paramour gave him the Bronx cheer."

"KGB agents were never good lovers."

"It was a gamble. What we didn't know was that Natasha, or whatever the hell her name was, had been stringing Yurchenko along. She never had any intention of running off with him and raising a houseful of little defectors in Virginia."

"What did Yurchenko do when he realized he had made the trip for nothing?"

"He went into a funk and told me he no longer believed in the American dream."

"Nothing you've told me so far explains what you are doing in the CIA carwash."

"Although the Ottawa trip did not go as expected, I was forgiven by the director and still permitted to be Yurchenko's baby sitter. I took him to the Smithsonian, the Kennedy Center, the Capitol, and stood in line six hours for a tour of the White House."

"Isn't that a dangerous place for a defector?"

"The Soviets would never look for a turncoat in a tourist line at the White House. In any case,

my job was to keep him happy. The only thing that drove me up the wall was Yurchenko never picked up a tab. I mean, we're talking about 120 days of breakfast, lunch and dinner. Every time the check came he sat there with his hands in his pockets and pretended he didn't see the saucer. Wouldn't this tee you off?"

"Yes, it would. But wasn't it the CIA's money?"

"Maybe so, but Yurchenko could at least have made a gesture. The final straw was when I took him to dinner at Au Pied de Cochon in Georgetown. I made up my mind that for just once Vitaly was going to pay the bill. When it came we sat there staring at each other. I didn't make a move, and neither did he. Finally he said to me, 'What if I walked out of this restaurant without paying the check? Would you shoot me?' I said, 'Of course not. We don't shoot cheap defectors who won't pick up the tab.' So Yurchenko got up and left. I gave the waiter my credit card, but by the time he returned it was too late. Yurchenko was sleeping safely in the Soviet compound."

I said, "Now I understand everything except why they assigned you to the carwash."

K wiped a fender with a chamois cloth. "The boys on the seventh floor believe this is the best place to hide until Bill Casey no longer wants to kill me."

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